

Maurice Hinchey NEWS

22nd CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT, NEW YORK

For Immediate Release:

December 15, 2006

Contact: Wendy Darwell

202-225-6335 (office)

wendy.darwell@mail.house.gov

Monticello Casino Proposal Gets Critical Federal Approval Hinchey Urges Governor, Interior to Move Forward with Final Sign-Offs

Kingston, NY -- U.S. Rep. Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today responded to the news that the St. Regis Mohawk tribe's application to develop a casino on the site of the Monticello Raceway has cleared a critical review by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

The *New York Times* reported today that the Interior Department had issued a "finding of no significant impact," (FONSI), the agency's indication that the development of a casino on that site would not place an undue burden on the environment or the community. Hinchey called Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne last week to urge him to move forward with the FONSI determination, after the application appeared to have been stalled.

Although important, the issuance of the FONSI is not the final approval needed to bring gaming to the Catskills. Governor Pataki must now sign off on a concurrence of the FONSI, followed by the Department of Interior's agreement to take the Monticello property into trust for the tribe.

Hinchey has repeatedly encouraged the approval of the St. Regis Mohawks' casino, which would be sited on a property that already hosts commercial gaming, has been thoroughly vetted by the public and would cause the least disruption to the community. He strongly opposed an earlier state proposal that would have allowed five casinos in the region.

Hinchey reacted to today's news:

"I have long supported this proposal because I believe that it's the best way to bring the economic benefits of gaming to the Catskills -- thousands of construction jobs, thousands of permanent jobs for casino operation, and the revitalization of the region's tourism industry -- without sacrificing the quality of life for the residents of Sullivan County. The opening of one casino, on a property that has already been developed for such purposes, operated by a tribe that has already made agreements with local government to mitigate any financial strain such development would cause, will give residents the opportunity to determine whether they want this kind of development and whether their communities can absorb the impact of additional casinos.

"The issuance of the FONSI for the St. Regis Mohawks' application is a very encouraging and important step in the process of bringing Indian gaming to the Catskills, but there is more work to be done. I strongly urge Governor Pataki and Secretary Kempthorne to sign off on the two outstanding approvals needed to make a casino at the Monticello Raceway a reality."

###